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Chairman: Ms. Londoño (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Colombia)

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In the absence of Mr. Belinga-Eboutou (Cameroon), Ms. Londoño (Colombia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 113: Promotion and protection of the rights of children *(continued)* (A/58/272, 282, 328, 329 and 420)

1. **Ms. Ivanchenko** (Ukraine) said that the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly had given new impetus to international cooperation and national initiatives in favour of children. The Parliament of Ukraine had recently ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, which complemented national legislation on trafficking in persons, thus ensuring the full legal protection of children from harm and violence. Furthermore, the Government was implementing a number of comprehensive national programmes for the legal and social protection of children and their integral development.

2. Despite progress, Ukraine was still experiencing difficulties. It was particularly concerned about children's health as a result of the tragic accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, because attending to the health of the population affected by the disaster was still a challenge, particularly with regard to pregnant women and children. Almost two million children had been affected, and almost 18 years later, Ukraine was still dealing with the consequences.

3. Another cause for concern was the spread of HIV/AIDS. A State programme for combating the disease had helped prevent many cases of mother-to-child transmission, and Ukraine appreciated the support provided by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

4. The twenty-seventh special session had identified the areas on which the efforts of the international community should focus to ensure better protection of the rights of children and their development. Ukraine was fully committed to those goals and ready to cooperate with all countries to attain them.

5. **Ms. Fusano** (Japan) said that Japan was extremely concerned about the number of children affected by armed conflict in countries such as Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Iraq. Consequently, it had made a large contribution to be used for the relief of Iraqi children, in particular for a campaign to encourage their return to school.

6. Child trafficking was one of the worst forms of the commercial sexual exploitation of children, particularly in South-East Asia. The problem was complicated by its cross-border nature and its causes, which included the socio-economic gap between the countries concerned and the differences in their legal systems. In February 2003, Japan had hosted an international symposium on trafficking in children, which had concluded that solving the problem required a comprehensive approach involving Governments, international organizations and regional non-governmental organizations.

7. Another major problem that Japan was addressing was the elimination of harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation. It had reached an agreement with the Sudan to cooperate on the elimination of that practice, and a symposium had been held to raise public awareness and create the necessary momentum. Japan appreciated the efforts made by the Sudan and hoped that such actions would have a beneficial influence on neighbouring countries where the practice continued.

8. Japan was continuing efforts to modify its domestic legislation so as to protect and promote the rights of children with regard to child prostitution and pornography, and was taking measures to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

9. **Mr. ElHussein** (Sudan) said that the continuing attention focused on the rights of the child since the World Summit for Children in 1990 had been further heightened with the adoption of the document "A World Fit for Children" at the special session on children in 2002. International cooperation was instrumental in supporting the efforts of the developing countries to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child. If the current situation persisted, those countries would be further marginalized and hampered in their efforts by the widening gap between rich and poor, in addition to such problems as debt, malnutrition, malaria and AIDS, by which Africa was particularly affected.

10. His country had been among the first to sign and ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child,

following which it had put in place various measures, including a national plan of action, aimed at guaranteeing those rights, especially in matters of education and health. Poliomyelitis had been eradicated and efforts to roll back endemic diseases such as malaria were ongoing. Legislation consistent with the Convention had also been enacted.

11. It was imperative to resolve the problem of child employment, particularly in jobs detrimental to health or education, by adopting measures to eradicate poverty, ensure wide-scale access to education and provide families with support and the means to guarantee a sustainable income. Decisive action to strengthen legal mechanisms and international cooperation was also imperative to tackling child trafficking and prostitution. He emphasized the progress made in raising awareness of the impact of armed conflict on children, in which regard adequate resources were necessary to enable the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to fulfil its mandate. He felt confident that the emerging peace in the Sudan would enhance the well-being of its children, particularly since the rights of the child had been incorporated as an element of the peace negotiations.

12. **Mr. Amorós Núñez** (Cuba) said that, despite the commitment and work of the United Nations to promote the welfare of children, the living conditions of most children in the world were becoming harsher owing to poverty, disease, malnutrition and lack of educational facilities. The prevailing world order ensured the well-being of only those children who formed part of the privileged sectors, which represented only 20 per cent of the global population. Consequently, the industrialized countries should honour their international commitments and complement the efforts of developing countries with a new spirit of solidarity. Official development assistance should be increased and the agricultural subsidies that prevented the exports of developing countries from being competitive should be eliminated. Likewise, the industrialized world should allow developing countries to cease servicing their external debt.

13. The Convention on the Rights of the Child provided an essential framework for resolving problems relating to children. Cuba had signed the two Optional Protocols on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography as a component of its human rights cooperation. It had ratified the former and was considering ratification of the latter.

14. Cuba recognized the valuable work of the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in raising awareness of the effect of war on children. His work derived from a mandate of the General Assembly, and Cuba was concerned that the latter was becoming marginalized, while the Security Council's involvement in that area of the Assembly's competence was growing. Cuba was surprised that, in his report (A/58/328), the Special Representative had not recommended actions that the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council could take to reduce the impact of armed conflict on children.

15. A discussion with the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography would have been very useful. The industrialized world encouraged such criminal activities by offering an extensive market for those activities. The United States lacked the moral authority to draw up lists of countries and apply illegal sanctions in relation to the trafficking of women and children or, for political ends, to point a finger at Cuba, whose measures in favour of women and children were internationally acknowledged to be exemplary.

16. Cuba, a poor country which had been subjected to a rigid economic, commercial and financial embargo for more than 40 years, was proud of its achievements with regard to childcare. Its social assistance programmes, based on the principle of equal opportunities and social justice, had made free schooling available to all Cuban children. In the area of health care, infant mortality had been reduced to 6.5 for every 1,000 live births and all children were protected against 13 preventable diseases.

17. **Ms. Al-Thani** (Qatar) said that children's issues were central to policy-making in Qatar, where the State was responsible under the Constitution for the welfare of children and for protecting them from exploitation and neglect. A committee comprising members of the Government and organizations from civil society had been set up to study the situation of children as a prelude to the formulation of a national plan of action to promote the rights of children, in line with the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly on children. Her Government was active in international efforts to improve children's lives, including the preparations for the third High-Level

Arab Conference on the Rights of the Child, organized by the League of Arab States, and was in the process of preparing its first report under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. She welcomed the entry into force of the amendment to article 43, paragraph 2, of the Convention, increasing the number of members of the Committee, which would enable it to carry out its new tasks, including monitoring the implementation of the Optional Protocols to the Convention.

18. Among the other steps her Government had taken to protect women and children from violence, she drew attention to the establishment of the Qatari Organization for the Protection of Women and Children and of a special office and hotline to provide assistance to children who were victims of abuse, violence or exploitation.

19. The reality experienced by children in many parts of the world was far removed from the ideals voiced at the special session of the General Assembly, as a result of poverty, unfavourable economic and social conditions, the spread of AIDS, natural disasters and famine. Urgent and effective international action was called for in order to meet those challenges and also to spare children from the horrors of armed conflict and foreign occupation, for, if children were truly to enjoy all the rights set forth in international instruments, their parents must first enjoy the right to self-determination and to live in freedom.

20. **Ms. Khalil** (Egypt), highlighting Egypt's recent efforts to protect and strengthen the rights of the child, said that her Government had withdrawn its reservations to articles 20 and 21 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had ratified the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. With the aim of eliminating the educational gap between the sexes by 2005, Egypt's current five-year plan devoted special attention to the education of girls, particularly in the governorates, where the female drop-out rate was high. A national task force had also been established in order to draw up plans and evaluate progress on the subject, to which end a number of workshops had been held, culminating in various recommendations designed to promote girls' education and to mobilize civil society in that effort. Extra schools were now being built in order to accommodate the increasing numbers of children in all stages of education.

21. In the governorates, Egypt was currently implementing information-training and awareness-raising programmes aimed at eradicating female circumcision, particularly in the case of very young girls, by 2010. A conference on the subject, held in Cairo in June 2003, had recommended intergovernmental consultation and civil-society involvement as ways towards ending the practice, as well as its prohibition under legislation dealing with issues of gender equality. In early 2003, a special strategy aimed at ending the worst forms of child labour had also been put in place and included such measures as the establishment of an information database on the subject, legislative and policy amendments, awareness-raising campaigns and programmes to help and rehabilitate children forced into work by their families. She agreed that the international community now had the wherewithal to reverse the trend of repugnant acts perpetrated against children exposed to armed conflict, a goal which demanded serious commitment and political will, as well as enormous effort. She also agreed that an integrated network should be established to provide, on a regular basis, objective and accurate monitoring and notification of violations against children. She hoped, however, that the next report would no longer omit any mention of the wrongful and tragic situation of children under foreign occupation, particularly in the occupied Palestinian territories.

22. **Mr. Paolillo** (Uruguay), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR) and the associated countries Bolivia and Chile, said that, for the MERCOSUR countries, Bolivia and Chile, the Convention on the Rights of the Child provided a frame of reference for initiatives in favour of children and adolescents. Moreover, most of those countries had ratified the optional protocols to the Convention.

23. The issue of the promotion and protection of the rights of the child was at the core of the social agenda of the MERCOSUR countries, Bolivia and Chile. In accordance with the Charter of Buenos Aires on Social Commitment of June 2000, they had decided to promote application of the guiding principles aimed at the full protection of children and adolescents and at encouraging the elaboration of specific policies on

their behalf that took into account their needs within the family and the community.

24. Thus, special attention had been focused on the most vulnerable social groups, giving priority to such aspects as nutrition. Measures had also been taken to meet the special needs of children and adolescents in situations of violence and sexual abuse, particularly in the case of teenage pregnancy, drug use and criminal behaviour.

25. On the issue of child labour, the Presidents of the MERCOSUR countries, Bolivia and Chile had issued a declaration reaffirming their commitment to strengthening national plans to prevent and eradicate child labour and had pledged to work towards defining common policies for achieving full protection. The MERCOSUR countries, Bolivia and Chile had committed themselves to guaranteeing the right to basic education and promoting access to secondary, technical and vocational education, recognizing that those were key elements for overcoming poverty and suitable vehicles for social and economic mobility. Likewise they were working to improve the quality of education through teacher training, the promotion of civic values, and the use of information technologies, while using the family unit as the basis for social policies to encourage children to remain in school. An effort was being made to include the many Afro-descendant and indigenous children in the process. One way to promote respect for their cultures was to provide bilingual education and that effort was being made despite the considerable resources required.

26. The health indices of the MERCOSUR countries, Bolivia and Chile had improved, but presented an ongoing challenge owing to difficulties relating to the region's economic and social development. Particularly challenging was the need to provide care for children and adolescents affected with HIV/AIDS, an area in which the countries had assumed a clear commitment that was reflected in important prevention, care and treatment initiatives.

27. Street children represented another serious problem, despite the efforts made to combat it. There was also concern about the increase in the number of cases of children from the subregion who had been abducted or retained by a parent residing abroad. The concern should be viewed from a human rights perspective that imposed on the international community a conduct guided by the best interests of the child, and the right to have regular contact with both parents and to be heard by the competent courts. Initiatives to standardize the way in which the issue of the return of minors from abroad was dealt with were being examined.

28. **Ms. Pulido Santana** (Venezuela) said that Venezuela's Constitution and legislation promoted and protected the full enjoyment by children of their rights, who were recognized as persons with full rights before the law. As far as the use of children in armed conflict was concerned, the minimum age for entry into the armed forces in Venezuela was 18 and members of the armed forces were trained to respect all human rights, particularly those of women and children, which helped create a culture of respect for the individual in situations of war or conflict.

29. She outlined a number of steps taken by her Government to help children and young people. It had set up a national programme to provide comprehensive, timely and high-quality care to children and young people living in the street, and encouraged the population to participate in public life from an early age, so that children would learn to freely express their opinions on issues of national importance: thus, a children's parliament allowed children to make their views known on matters that directly affected them, the Ministry of Health and Social Development had consulted children in its review of its yearly plan in 2001, and a national workshop had been held in 2002 on the subject of children and young people as "social auditors", with a view to reviewing policy guidelines.

30. At the international level, Venezuela had recently ratified the second of the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Office of the Ombudsman had reached an agreement with UNICEF on training officials to act as children's advocates, publicizing human rights issues and evolving mechanisms for the protection of those rights. She realized that there was a long way to go before children and young people in Venezuela were able to enjoy all their rights, but progress was being made despite an adverse economic climate, political unrest and opposition to every government initiative aimed at helping the most disadvantaged in Venezuelan society.

31. **Mr. Knyazhinskiy** (Russian Federation) said that the twentieth century had been a turning point for the world's children, since it was in the twentieth century that children had first been treated as individuals with

special rights. Indeed, the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been elaborated on such a basis, and his delegation wished to reiterate the importance of its universal ratification while stressing the usefulness of the reporting process under that instrument.

32. The outcome of the special session on children was being incorporated into all relevant federal programmes. A programme for the period up to 2006 incorporated special initiatives on children's health, gifted children, child neglect and juvenile delinquency, orphans and disabled children, while a programme focusing on the rights of indigenous children in the Russian North was also being developed.

33. Within the United Nations, the work of the ad hoc committee on a comprehensive and integral international convention on protection and promotion of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities had stimulated enhancement of relevant legislation at the national level. Appropriately revised legislation in the Russian Federation was aimed at furthering the realization of disabled children's rights to education, social rehabilitation and integration. The Government was also taking urgent steps to address the recognized problem of sexual and economic exploitation of minors, as well as child neglect and child homelessness within the Russian Federation.

34. In April 2003, an all-Russian conference had been convened to promote the development of a children's movement, which was fully in line with the results of the special session and Children's Forum. The way children were treated today would determine how they would treat today's adults in their old age. Moreover, there was no nobler mission than to protect the world's children from suffering and fear.

35. **Mr. Myaing** (Myanmar) said that the almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the outcome of the special session on children showed that there was a strong political will within the international community to create a world fit for children, but the lives of children around the world continued to be affected by disease, armed conflict and poverty. His Government placed particular emphasis on the survival, development, protection and participation of children, and was implementing a national plan of action in those areas with the cooperation of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations. The plan of action had produced tangible progress in the areas of education, health, nutrition, safe drinking water, sanitation and early childcare, leading to a marked drop in infant mortality rates. Immunization coverage had been improved and the use of vitamin A supplements and iodized salt had become more widespread. A special effort had been made to minimize the gap in education and health services between rural and urban areas.

36. His Government attached high priority to developing the education sector, and was in the process of implementing a long-term programme designed to ensure that every child had the opportunity to receive an education. The programme included the introduction of online education facilities through the establishment of "e-education learning centres", and several thousand schools had been equipped with multimedia classrooms. Thanks to a school-based project to teach children throughout the country about healthy living, over a million children had already been taught about HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. Non-governmental organizations also played an active role at the community level in the prevention of those diseases.

37. Myanmar was one of the few countries in South-East Asia that still faced armed insurgency, a legacy of colonial rule. Nevertheless, no one under the age of 18 could be recruited into the armed forces and there was no conscription in Myanmar; allegations that the army was using child soldiers were simply an attempt by terrorist groups and drug traffickers to discredit the armed forces. In order to show the international community that it had nothing to hide in that respect, his Government had therefore invited the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to visit Myanmar before the end of 2003.

38. **Mr. Baali** (Algeria) said that, although the special session had been able to record significant progress in the implementation of the rights of the child, the situation of children remained precarious in many countries, where millions of children were still living in sub-human conditions, forced to live in the streets and exploited as child soldiers. Because of their vulnerability, children were the main victims of poverty, pandemics and armed conflict. To restore dignity to those millions of children, account must be taken of their economic and social rights: it could not be repeated too often that human rights included the right to education, health care, food, water and shelter.

39. African countries had already taken steps to resolve the socio-economic barriers to the self-fulfilment of children — for example through the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) — but they did not have the resources to confront all the challenges facing them. It was vital that all members of the international community should pool their efforts to mitigate the negative effects of globalization and attain the goals agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development; they also needed to reconsider their approach to the right to development.

40. His Government had made enormous efforts to promote the rights of the child, including through the implementation of comprehensive and coordinated action plans aimed at reducing child mortality, improving child nutrition, promoting access to primary education for all and assisting children in especially difficult circumstances. Significant progress had been achieved in the fields of health care and education in Algeria: child mortality had been reduced by three quarters in only three decades and practically all boys and 9 out of 10 girls were enrolled in school. Everyone was concerned by the plight of children: his Government would spare no effort in implementing the Plan of Action adopted at the special session of the General Assembly.

41. **Mr. Gallegos Chiriboga** (Ecuador) said that it was time for all countries to stop talking and start acting, to ensure that children could grow up in a world that offered them the security and protection they needed. However, Governments in all parts of the world had limited resources for children's programmes and faced constraints relating to economic and other inequalities, housing shortages, environmental degradation, disease, hunger, poor education and the breakdown of the family. His Government gave high priority to meeting the goals set at the special session and had taken a number of measures to protect their rights and meet their needs. It had increased social spending, especially that related to children, despite being severely hampered by external debt, and its 1998 Constitution affirmed the primacy of the best interests of the child and established a new social and legal status for children that was aimed at giving effect to their rights as citizens.

42. The new Children's and Young People's Code, which had entered into force in July 2003, was based on the principle of "all rights for all children" and was the fruit of widespread consultations, including numerous workshops on such issues as adoption, child labour, child abuse, health care, education and the liability of juvenile offenders. The Code contained innovative provisions to address those issues, for example by promoting social policies to encourage children to attend school and by requiring provincial governments to set up child protection boards at the cantonal level and to establish rules for the proper rehabilitation of juvenile offenders. The 1998 Constitution and the Children's and Young People's Code were two aspects of a long and productive process of social mobilization aimed at allowing children and young people to enjoy their rights; they provided the necessary legal framework for overcoming the poverty, exclusion, exploitation and abuse that prevented so many of them from living a life of dignity.

43. It was time to establish mechanisms that would ensure the full implementation of States' international commitments with regard to children, but one factor in particular prevented them from allocating the necessary budgetary resources to social ends: external debt. A sustainable solution needed to be found, since without resources, it would be very difficult to counter the deterioration in the quality of life of children and young people. Another problem of particular concern, and one that was getting worse by the day, was the migration of adults who left their children behind. That problem needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency in order to prevent the further breakdown of the family.

44. Finally, he thanked UNICEF for providing his Government with resources and advice on the development of its ten-year plan for the social sector, which was currently under discussion by State agencies and relevant organizations from civil society, and for its unwavering support for his Government's efforts to provide for children's welfare.

45. **Mr. Mekashher** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that there was a wide discrepancy between official commitments regarding the rights of the child and achievements on the ground. The exploitation of children and the violation of their rights was still manifest in the form of physical and psychological abuse and the lack of basic services. More than any other group in society, children were still exposed to the impact of conflicts and economic sanctions.

46. A particular case in point was the situation in occupied Palestine, where the Israeli occupying forces deliberately killed children, denied the injured access to urgent assistance, demolished homes while their occupants were still inside, tortured children and killed their parents in front of them, all in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and human rights instruments. The international community should shoulder its responsibility to stop the crimes against Palestinian children, recognizing that the rights of the children of the world were indivisible.

47. The legislation of his country protected children against various forms of discrimination. All Libyans, male and female, were free and enjoyed equal rights before the law. Libyan laws guaranteed the right of children to free expression and creativity, and criminalized the abuse of children. Considerable progress had also been made in the field of children's health. The rate of coverage for all required vaccinations had reached 100 per cent, several diseases such as polio had been eradicated, and the rate of malnutrition was lower than in other countries of the region.

48. His country had been among the first States unconditionally to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and was submitting the required reports under that Convention. It had also been among the first in Africa to ratify the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. It was also a party to International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, and its laws prohibited the employment of children under the age of 15. The competent Libyan authorities were also studying the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, with a view to accession.

49. While highlighting the achievements of his country in the area of child survival, development and protection, he also wished the Committee to be aware that hundreds of children had died in road accidents because of the continuing embargo on air travel imposed on his country, and many children continued to be injured by the explosion of mines planted during the Second World War.

50. His country reaffirmed its commitment to devise new plans to ensure a brighter future for its children, through the provision of primary health care and increased school enrolments. It called for intensified measures to combat malnutrition and disease, especially in Africa, through the establishment of centres for prevention and treatment. On the basis of his country's belief in defending the rights of African children and adults to health and well-being, the Leader of the Revolution had announced, in a statement at the Abuja African Summit of April 2001 on HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, the establishment of the African Research Centre for Disease Control, the largest share of the cost of which would be shouldered by the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Assistance and resources should also be provided to countries affected by unexploded mines, to which many children fell victim.

51. In conclusion, he said that, while there were many urgent issues, nothing could be more vital than the survival of the world's children.

52. **Ms. Bonkongou** (Burkina Faso) said that over half of her country's population was under 19, and that widespread poverty made children extremely vulnerable. Burkina Faso had long since ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and had taken domestic measures to promote children's survival, development and welfare. Their situation in Burkina Faso remained alarming, however, with unsatisfactory health and education indicators and abysmal life expectancy. To combat that evil, the Government had allocated resources from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative to those priority sectors. The country also benefited from UNICEF's 25/2005 initiative for promoting the education of girls in 25 countries by 2005. Since poverty sometimes neutralized actions in favour of children, another priority sector for the Government was agriculture, which, although occupying 80 per cent of the population, was insufficient for the country's food security.

53. Regarding children in armed conflict, her country continued to feel the effects of the humanitarian crisis caused by the events of 2002 in Côte d'Ivoire, whence some 300,000 refugees from Burkina Faso — over half of them children — had returned to Burkina Faso in traumatic conditions, jeopardizing their health, education and food status. Some had been unable to finish school, thereby swelling the ranks of street children. However, with the help of civil society, UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration, steps had been taken to alleviate their suffering. An equally distressing problem was traffic in

children, whereby they were subjected to the worst forms of labour and mistreatment.

54. A pilot survey had identified many girl victims of sexual exploitation under eight years of age. In that context, Burkina Faso had ratified the ILO Conventions on the Minimum Age and on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, and had inserted a provision in the Penal Code to suppress child labour. Multidisciplinary watchdog committees, set up in the provinces where the phenomenon was most rife, were responsible for raising awareness, taking charge of victims, and reporting the perpetrators. Welcoming the decision in General Assembly resolution 57/190 (part II, para. 29) to have the Secretary-General conduct an in-depth study on violence against children, she hoped that, with the international community's support, suitable strategies would eventually be developed for the various countries.

55. In March 2003 her country had hosted an African symposium on children's rights and social exclusion, organized in collaboration with UNICEF and a number of foreign institutions. The participants had identified the progress made and the main obstacles encountered and had outlined strategies that would better guarantee children's rights.

56. Children in Burkina Faso participated in the defence of their rights through the Children's Parliament, while a committee regularly monitored implementation of the Plan of Action adopted at the 1990 World Summit for Children. Burkina Faso was up to date with its reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and was seeking the best ways of implementing its latest recommendations.

57. **Ms. Ng** Yuin-Lyn (Singapore) said that Singapore, a small country whose only resource was its people, believed in the development of children and in preparing them for adult life. In 2003 it was spending over 2 per cent of its gross domestic product on programmes for children. Its education initiatives were aimed at the holistic development of children's talents and abilities, encouraging self-confidence, initiative, inquisitiveness and creativity. The 2003 Compulsory Education Act ensured the right to six years of education, and reached out to a small minority not enrolled in school, so as to give all children the firm foundation of a common core of knowledge. Since education enabled children to break out of the cycle of disadvantage, special programmes had been put in place to give children from low-income families access to educational opportunities. Such children also had access to grants, subsidized or free tuition, and free textbooks. Children with special needs were helped to integrate into regular schools.

58. When special protection or rehabilitation was needed, a coordinated inter-agency approach was adopted to ensure that children's interests were protected. In the early intervention programme to identify very young children from families at risk, the children were linked to social service agencies so that their parents received specific help that minimized disadvantage to their children. Strong emphasis was placed on health services for the young and there was a systematic programme of immunization and health surveillance of young children, followed by comprehensive health and dental services for schoolchildren. With the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) earlier in 2003, a prime focus of national policy had been containment of the disease in schools. An important component of health protection was parental involvement and education, which went a long way towards achieving children's continuous good health.

59. Support from the family — intergenerational, as well as parental and sibling care — was an essential ingredient for ensuring the best interests of the child. In turn, the State should support the family, and her country had a range of family support community services, including affordable child care, family service centres and community-run family life programmes. The need to continually chart new strategies to suit children's changing requirements must be met in partnership with the United Nations system, and she applauded UNICEF's endeavours in that regard. Singapore's vision for its children was that they should be attuned to the world, yet anchored by strong ties; self-confident, yet compassionate and aware of their social responsibilities. In making that vision a reality, it would reverse the list of failures and give the child the best it had to give.

60. **Archbishop Migliore** (Observer for the Holy See) said that, after the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the holding of the World Summit for Children and the adoption of the Millennium Declaration, children were once more at the centre of United Nations concern. Those events, combined with the General Assembly's adoption at its special session on children of the document "A World

Fit for Children", demonstrated the international community's commitment to a better future for children. Children suffered daily as casualties of war, disability, marginalization, drugs, man-made and natural disasters and, directly or indirectly, of disease, such as HIV/AIDS, which killed them or left them orphaned. The infant and child mortality rate could be lowered dramatically through means that were readily available but often beyond the reach of the most needy.

61. The international community must address those challenges, especially within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals, assigning priority to improving child health and nutrition, striving towards optimal growth and development in childhood and eradicating hunger, malnutrition and famine, thus sparing millions of children unnecessary suffering in a world capable of providing them with food and care, to say nothing of basic education. Children must also be encouraged to make their own small contribution to a better future for their peers, using their talents and gifts for their personal growth and the good of society. Founded in the nineteenth century, the Holy See's Pontifical Society of the Holy Childhood, a children's association with the motto "Let children help children", had for decades shared its members' talents in order to ameliorate the lives of children worldwide.

62. The family, the fundamental unit of society, should be given every protection in the interests of children's welfare. Concern for children posed a direct challenge for the family, but it was there that children's rights were best respected. Parents had the duty and right to be their children's principal educators. It was the lack of a legally guaranteed family policy that imposed the need for a set of norms that protected the various rights of the child. With the forthcoming tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, efforts should be directed towards greater recognition of the social role of the family. While children's rights were now more widely recognized, their violation in practice continued to be alarming. Children's welfare must be given priority at all stages of their development from the moment of their conception. The international community must not fail them and must take political action at the highest level; the attention they received would make for their own and society's continuous well-being.

63. **Mr. Skinnebach** (Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said that the vulnerability of children remained an acute challenge worldwide, as reflected in the daily work of the Federation in improving the lot of children in a variety of negative situations, especially at a time of innumerable victims of HIV/AIDS, poverty, sexual exploitation and discrimination. If the efforts of the member Red Cross and Red Crescent societies at dialogue with Governments to find solutions were to succeed, it was imperative that the societies' value to their respective Governments was recognized. He welcomed the Spanish Government's response to the Spanish Red Cross's proposal to hold an international conference later in the year to address issues relating to children in armed conflict, which would afford an opportunity to consider the best ways of promoting a culture of peace among children.

64. His main message to Governments and pertinent international organizations was that the family unit should be maintained and that families and communities should be given the resources to protect and care for their children. Although orphanages should be a last resort, the fact that HIV/AIDS had created so many orphans and had so decimated some families as to leave no family member to act as surrogate parent, enhanced the value of orphanages such as the one in Zimbabwe, supported by the Danish Red Cross, which cared for and educated orphaned and vulnerable children and gave support to surviving adults. One of IFRC's priorities was to support its network in Africa, where the 14 million HIV/AIDS orphans were expected to increase to 25 million by 2010. Moreover, the IFRC guidelines to help Red Cross and Red Crescent societies assist children orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS were a valuable contribution to the work of civil society.

65. Red Cross societies in southern Africa had made great progress in integrating orphaned and vulnerable children into their programmes, helping such children to remain in school, supporting caregivers, establishing day-care centres and offering physiological and psychological support, especially in the context of HIV/AIDS. Priority was also given to anti-stigma work, which lay at the heart of the struggle against the pandemic.

66. It was important for children to be involved in defining their own problems and needs, and in programme design, implementation and monitoring. He called on all Governments to abide by their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to use the Committee on the Rights of the Child to share

experiences and benefit from its members' expertise. All Governments must recognize that programmes for the protection of the best interests of the child required long-term commitments founded on sustainable programmes, in a continuum that provided for children as well as for the development of the communities in which they would live as adults. Partnership should be consolidated, and all Governments should establish productive relationships with their respective national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies so that they could speak with one voice at the forthcoming International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, unanimity being essential for an effective agenda for the promotion and protection of children.

67. **Ms. Hermoso** (Observer for the International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that ILO's 2002 global estimate of 246 million child workers showed that 73 million of them were under 10, while millions of others were intolerably exploited, or trapped in human trafficking, debt bondage or other illicit activities, and 22,000 died each year from work-related accidents. Intensifying its technical cooperation and advisory and advocacy work, ILO had formulated country programmes for policy reform and the ratification of its child labour conventions, and for building institutional capacity and supporting measures for the application of those conventions. A majority of its member States had ratified the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention and the Minimum Age Convention, and in 2002-2003 one million children had benefited from ILO programmes, especially regarding the worst forms of child labour and the situation of the girl child.

68. ILO's "Red card to child labour" campaign, held at international soccer competitions, was intended to raise public awareness of the problem and mobilize support for its eradication, while its "SCREAM stop child labour" project promoted children's rights through education, the arts and the media. Time-bound programmes, already under way in some countries, set strategic objectives and targets at the international, national, local and family levels and focused on the root causes of child labour, linking action against child labour to social development initiatives and poverty reduction strategies. ILO's work in that regard involved civil society, intergovernmental organizations and development partners in a number of developed countries. A comprehensive approach to sustainable development must include actions and policies to curb the supply of and demand for child labour, which must be addressed in the context of national development initiatives.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.